

Hardships

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Summary: Hardships come to everyone at some point in their lives. Sometimes, these hardships can change you for the better. And sometimes, they change people for the worse. Post sequel, but no Valka. Rated T for grief. BEWARE THE HORRIDNESS OF THIS STORY.

Hardships

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A/N: I don't even know what this piece of crud is anymore, I honestly don't. I feel really horrible, but I needed to give my feels a chance to shine themselves upon my stories. This is probably the most immature thing I have ever written. I do not give one single freaking fig. I do not even know what this is, but I must give my feels free rein. Stoick's death hurt me so much, so I had to write this.

On a side note, even though I know they have absolutely nothing to do with each other, I can't help but feel that this one-shot and Within Temptation's 'Ice Queen' go together. I wrote a lot of this while listening to that song, because I kinda connected it to Hiccup's cold indifference. I don't know. Again, this is immature and not at all good. Last chance to turn back.

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Hardships come to everyone at some point in their lives. Sometimes, these hardships can change you for the better.

And sometimes, they change people for the worse.

Astrid watched as Snotlout quickened his pace upon seeing his cousin, stumbling under the weight of twenty different axes. She sighed as she lowered her own gleaming weapon, peering around the forge to get

a good look at him. What a change had come over Hiccup in these past few months!

Such a change, Astrid reflected sadly, that he wasn't even the same person anymore. He wasn't the boy she'd fallen in love with on that dragon ride, and he wasn't the man she'd dreamed of marrying. Rather, he'd become harsh and cold towards everybody, even her. He led the village fairly well, but there was a cool indifference there that had made people question a time or two about whether he actually cared about them at all.

"He's like ice," she recalled Spitelout commenting once as he watched Hiccup work in the stiff, jerky movements that were so unlike his regular fluid grace. "He's just so cold with anyone."

At the time, she had sprung readily to his defense, but, by and by, she had begun to realize that Spitelout was right. Hiccup was like ice.

Every time Astrid reached out to him, embraced him, kissed him, he simply nodded in response and he seemed to expect it. When they were younger his eyes would snap open in shock, the goofy, dazed grin decorating his lips when she pulled away. Back then, she would look at him and know he desired her, know that he cared for her. And it would give her a happy little shiver every time. Now, the idea of marrying him felt like a death sentence.

Hiccup nodded at Snotlout when the boy set the crates down in front of him, but he said not a word of thanks or praise. He simply set his cousin another task before Snotlout scurried off. Astrid longed to approach Hiccup as he stood there snapping open a button on his armor, causing a few papers to scatter everywhere. He gave a bit of a sigh, kneeling down to pick them up.

Yes, she wanted to approach him then, and offer him help, and pick up his papers for him, but she didn't know if she'd be able. What would he even say to her? Would he give her that crooked smile that no one had seen for months? How did you melt such an icy demeanor?

* * *

><p>Over the next few days, Astrid really did try to find ways to melt the icy coldness that seemed to have taken root in Hiccup's heart. She wasn't the best at being gentle or sensitive, two things the situation seemed to call for, but the thought of giving up never once crossed her mind. Astrid Hofferson did not give up.<p>

She didn't expect Hiccup to be thrilled when she arrived at his house late one night, walking quickly underneath the stars, determined to speak to him, to get him to listen to her. Once she told him what was bothering her, once he understood what the villagers were beginning to think of his leadership, he would surely snap out of his grief. Even if it did take a punch or two.

After all, she knew Hiccup. He bounced back from everything. He'd bounced back all the times Snotlout laughed at him, he bounced back when he lost his legâ€¦it didn't matter that this was a bit more serious than his leg, that didn't matter at all. She was sure she was going to see a smile on his face soon.

But still, even though Astrid told herself these encouraging things, she couldn't quite bring herself to knock on the front door. She had one fist raised, ready to knock, but she found small reasons to delay. Wiping her bangs out of her face for the millionth time, checking to make sure her battleaxe was fully in place, scanning the night for Stormfly even though she knew the Deadly Nadder had already settled down in the stables.

Finally, just as she was about to go for it, she heard something unmistakable from inside: laughter. Not just any laughter, but high-pitched laughter that no Viking, save one, had. But, despite the shrill sound, it was definitely male.

If her jaw hadn't been attached to her face, she was sure it would have rolled off and hit the porch floor with how wide her mouth had opened. She couldn't help but smile widely when she realized how joyous he sounded, how happy. She had to see it for herself.

Slowly, so as not to let him know he was there and force him back into his now familiar coolness, she slid the door open and peeked inside, trying not to edge too far inside, lest he see her. But, as it turned out, there was no danger of him seeing her; he was sprawled out on the living room floor, a familiar Night Fury standing on top of him, effectively pinning his legs and licking him wherever he could.

"Toothless!" Hiccup shouted through his laughter. "Quit it, you know this doesn't wash out!"

Astrid couldn't help but laugh softly along with him as she watched the two playfully wrestle each other, rolling around on the wooden floor. Hiccup finally managed to gain the upper hand, putting a hand on Toothless' stomach and grinning. "I have brought down this mighty beast!" He declared, puffing his chest out in pretend pride.

Toothless smacked him in the back of the head with his tail, sending the Viking sprawling onto the ground. He rubbed a rapidly forming knot rather ruefully as he sat up on his knees. Toothless grinned at him when he glared and he gave the dragon a playful shove. "Get away from me," he mumbled, but he was smiling, for the first time in months. "You useless reptile."

Astrid didn't want to ruin Hiccup's unexpected happiness, so she began to reach for the door again, hoping it wouldn't creak on her way out. She heard Hiccup and Toothless start up something else that clearly involved either tremendously funny jokes or a lot of tickling, because Hiccup started laughing again.

She allowed herself a tiny smile in the darkness and nodded a bit. It felt like a weight had been lifted off her shoulders just by seeing him looking so happy. Not just that, but she felt like she finally understood. She could never fully understand what he had gone through, or the pain he had known, but she felt she understood what it meant when people said they needed time. Hiccup had just needed a bit of time. He might just be bouncing back.

End
file.